

THE REALITY OF LEADERSHIP PREPARATION IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING CONTEXT: BEST PRACTICE VS. REALITY

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The Call for Change

Educational leadership preparation programs have long been criticized for a wide range of transgressions (e.g. Levine, 2005). Many, if not most, programs offer little connection between the preparation programs' curriculum and actual school administrators' job realities (Barth, 1997; Bridges & Hallinger, 1993; Tucker & Coddling, 2002). Lack of relevance and congruity between theory and practice is a repeated, and all-too-often, valid student lament. Recruitment and selection procedures lack collaboration with school districts (Pounder & Young, 1996; Wendel, 1992). Haphazard curriculum development efforts attempt coherent and rigorous content (Hart & Weindling, 1996; McCarthy, 1999; Murphy, 1993), but the content is often being watered down to compete with mail order degree programs. Essential cultural, ethnic, gender, and linguistic issues in school communities are frequently missing from course consideration (Herrity & Glassman, 1999). Clinical experiences are occasionally insipid, unstructured, or even absent (Hart & Weindling, 1996). The foundation of this academic house is slipping given the lack of consistent and clear assumptions about the nature of leadership preparation noted by Bridges and Hallinger (1993) and Cambron-McCabe (1999).

These criticisms, studies, and commissions emanating from individual researchers, foundations, policy boards, and governmental agencies began being heard at a pivotal time. Women, African Americans, and other diverse groups, long excluded from the ranks of university faculty, began careers as assistant professors

in preparation programs, as did many baby boomers. These newly represented groups of educators embarked on their academic careers with extensive “real world” administrative experience and a notion that they could change things. This synergy has produced redesigned preparation programs focusing on team building, goal setting, collaborative decision-making, and conflict resolution (Crews & Weakley, 1995), in addition to an increased emphasis on improving student outcomes (Cambron-McCabe, 1993). Redesigned programs enhanced students’ collaborative skills by utilizing cohort models that foster a sense of community, social capital, and enhanced academic depth (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Hill, 1995; Kraus & Cordeiro, 1995; Norris & Barnett, 1994). Significant internship experiences, where students integrate practice with new knowledge and receive mentoring from practicing administrators, are among the most highly valued program experiences (Krueger & Milstein, 1995).

Some programs are working in cooperation with school districts to nominate, interview and select potential candidates (Murphy, 1993; Ogawa & Pounder, 1993). Innovative programs work around traditional semester course structures, blending into school systems’ calendars. Furthermore, programs structure teams of full-time faculty and practicing administrators to lead courses and locate nationally recognized speakers to challenge thinking around critical issues (Fusarelli & Smith, 1999; Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Field experiences are integrated into courses, academic content is organized around themes, student portfolios are used as part of their evaluations, and an advisory council composed of district and school-based administrators work with faculty to keep the academic content relevant (Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Despite this self-examination and effort, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) continues to call upon educational leadership departments

. . . to awaken from their complacency, reject the status quo, and respond to appeals and criticisms from the field by identifying new content that addresses what principals need to know in order to do their jobs and by devising instructional processes that ensure principals master essential knowledge and skills (Fry, O'Neil, & Bottoms, 2006, p. 11).

Rapidly Changing Context

The Educational Leadership program at the University of South Florida (USF) continues to be guided by existing calls for reform, national educational leadership standards, and best models from other universities as well as internally acknowledging the need to change course content and program delivery. When recognition of the need for widespread programmatic change occurs within a university located in a metropolitan area with extraordinary growth and corresponding demands for additional school leaders, the rate of change must be more revolutionary than an evolutionary.

University of South Florida (USF), located in a metropolitan area, is 1 of the 10 largest universities in the country with 44,038 students on four campuses. In 2003, the USF Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies faculty responded to internal and external impetus for change and simultaneously encountered several local factors demanding large numbers of new school leaders. Nationally the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects 9 – 17% growth for education administrator positions through 2014 (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006). Florida's growth rate was twice the national average from 2000 to 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006) which impacts USF's service region including four school districts in the top 100 largest in the United States with Hillsborough County at 8th, Pinellas County at 24th, Polk County at 34th, and Pasco County at 65th (Top 100 School Districts, 2006).

The population growth alone challenges local school districts looking for thousands of teachers and the corresponding stock of administrators. But the population expansion is also paired with a projected 66% administrative retirement rate by 2012 (NAESP Fact Sheet, 2006). These two factors have created an unprecedented need for qualified administrative replacements willing to pursue careers as school principals.

Launching the Change

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies' (DELPS) faculty initiated redevelopment of their program by establishing stronger collaboration with local school districts. In 2003, DELPS began a cooperative Masters Cohort program with a large local school district within their service region. Program parameters consisted of a district led selection process, shared teaching between local school administrators and USF faculty, a Friday evening and all day Saturday schedule for classes, and belief in the strength of a cohort. The entire program was bolstered by an expanded need for new administrators within a district experiencing enormous growth.

District selection was based on writing samples, interviews with panels of administrators, reviews of references, and credit for years of teaching experience. Thirty-four students were selected by the district and satisfied the USF entrance requirements. The district's whole school effectiveness model provided the theme in a planned co-teaching arrangement with school and district administrators. This approach was abandoned after two semesters, as the time commitments proved to be difficult for practicing administrators to fully participate in the co-teaching model. Further erosion of the initial model and cooperative spirit occurred as result of superintendency and departmental chair changes.

Nevertheless, commitments to students, and the continued need for new administrators, resulted in establishing another cohort by district and university personnel. Faculty impressions about program successes and recent research on best practices guided revision for this new cohort. The students in the first cohort were a valuable resource for input on program redesign through voluntary, anonymous student surveys.

Survey findings from the original cohort indicated that students strongly supported the cohort model and offered unanimous agreement on recommending the DELPS cohort program to others. When asked about the strengths of the program, working in the cohort setting was ranked highest, followed by high quality teaching by professors in the program. Ninety-four percent of the students ranked the program as excellent or good in their preparation for their future leadership positions. Student feedback on specific program elements was integrated and the M.Ed. was reduced from five to a very dynamic four semesters, Saturdays only model. Students took two classes on alternate Saturdays for 10 weeks and then one more class for the last five Saturdays of the semester.

New program elements were added, such as practitioner led evening sessions, more sequenced field experiences, extended technology offerings, and a self-selected diversity menu. Specific leadership themes were assigned to each semester for primary emphasis and "course" time was extended with field experiences. The program culminated in a 125-hour practicum experience during the last semester. The major practicum project stressed school improvement for enhanced student learning. Prior to 2003 USF offered practicum as a seldom-selected, loosely structured elective. At 125 hours in combination with additional field based activities interspersed throughout coursework, our program is still far from more ideal models of full time internships or 600-hour programs (Jackson & Kelley, 2002) that some institutions have been able to offer.

In fall 2006, DELPS initiated a cohort program with a new twist. In an effort to support practicing administrator development, another large district requested a doctoral cohort model structured according to its specific community needs. After meeting with district administrators, four areas were identified, and guiding questions were developed to focus program content, delivery, and eventual dissertation research. The guiding questions seek solutions for improving community literacy rates, addressing the achievement gap, tackling issues surrounding ethical leadership, and developing social capital within urban schools. Cohort members were given early release one day each week to attend class. Plans are underway for the district and its foundation to support professional conference attendance for subgroups of the cohort researching the four emphasized areas. Expanded partnerships between principal preparation programs and school districts are the key to offering cohort models to larger groups of students.

Revisions, Additions, Deletions and Implementation of Programmatic Changes

Enrollment expansion required the addition of several practicing administrators as adjuncts. The best and brightest adjuncts were selected from qualified local practitioners. This was auspicious for several reasons. Locally respected and recognized administrators assisted with program credibility and helped repair fragile district relationships. Students noted that a particular adjunct was the district principal of the year and another had just been promoted to a district level position. Students appreciated the credibility of adjuncts and recognized their value for networking as they moved toward administrative job searches.

Adjuncts brought new priorities, skills, experiences, connections, networks, and ideas about program delivery and content. Supplementing their adjustment to academia, faculty generously provided syllabi, materials, and support to adjuncts.

One faculty member and an adjunct worked together to develop new web-based materials, problem solving activities, and case studies.

A large and growing program meant that three to four sections of the same course were offered each semester. The need for consistency of content in courses became more acute. Syllabi agreement and amalgamation became essential. Additionally, USF's NCATE preparation provided impetus to revise course work, develop field experiences, technology ventures, diversity paths, and critical tasks in each course in all programs. Such scrutiny led to discussions by department faculty about the standards of each course and the essential features that should compose our program. Within another two semesters, the groundwork was complete for careful curriculum mapping to attend to repetitions and omissions of key concepts in courses. Levine (2005) listed this fusion of practitioner and academic as a quality indicator of effective leadership preparation.

The dynamic factors surrounding the program opened new dialogue and caused us to examine our direction. Thinking began about the next level of programmatic change. The catalyst for this change emanated from:

1. *Empowered student voices.* Our cohorts, with more perceived power in a group, are more vocal than individual students. They challenge procedures, policies, and content (Hill, 1995). A more interactive curriculum with more faculty and student exchange stimulated the opportunity for communicating suggestions, ideas, and specifics for improvement.
2. *Written sources.* Between 2005- 2007, three surveys of students provided perspectives to inform continual program improvement. Three classes were surveyed online. Students who attended our program wide

orientation sessions contributed feedback, impressions, suggestions, and kudos. Also, a subsequent online survey of all students generated 136 responses regarding their perceptions of intended career paths.

3. *Advisory board.* A newly structured advisory board was formed in 2005 with local school administrators holding a variety of positions from six districts representing 400,000 students. Each administrator was asked to bring their newest assistant principal to meetings. During one session, the group generated a list of major trends impacting Florida schools in the next 5 years. At another, strategies for retaining teachers and administrators were explored. Districts shared approaches, ideas, and directions. Suggestions for how our leadership preparation program should address these issues were compiled. Collaboration with school districts established more possibilities to share responsibility of key program components such as broader and more in-depth field experiences for graduate students who are their future school leaders.
4. *New sources of relevance.* Since 2005, an influx of practitioners as teaching faculty brought us alternative views and insights into the newest demands on schools. Using new lenses to consider course syllabi, content, and pedagogy stimulated ideas and techniques used by seasoned faculty.

Institutionalizing Changes

As we considered the evolutionary morphing of our cohort program, feedback from students, faculty, and our advisory board made it clear that many program aspects should be retained. In the short 2-year span of change, major factors were

gradually becoming institutionalized throughout our department's various degree programs. Factor descriptions follow.

Academic course content is organized around broad themes and constructs rather than reverting to old models where instructors covered their preferred topics. Major themes for the four-semester M.Ed. program provide anchors for the knowledge base (Appendix A). "*Critical tasks*" course assignments ensure field experiences and "on the job" activities become core learning experiences. Departmental faculty devised critical tasks for significance, increased consistency, and improved quality and rigor. Students have recognized the value of critical tasks as assigned course work due to their obvious relevance to practice.

Connections with practicing administrators were cultivated through our adjunct teaching group, advisory board, and special session presentations. Collaborations developing new course materials, web case studies, and other problem-based approaches have now advanced to discussions about co-presentations and co-publishing projects.

Changes often create clarity about other needs just as when we paint a room and then the appearance of the carpet demands attention. To move toward continual program development, many elements still occupy "*to do*" lists. For instance, course content needs to experience a more advanced sequencing examination through *curriculum mapping*. When overlap and/or gaps are eliminated, it may be possible to change *course requirements* (i.e. allowing more credit hours for practicum to accommodate a longer internship) or to reduce total program credit hours. In addition, technology and research courses need to be revised with focus on an *inquiry approach* to assist future school leaders in analyzing instruction and school testing data which are essential skills to be able to achieve critically based, continual school improvement.

Just as we need to continue to find ways to have *more extensive field experiences*, we also need to sequence experiences to gradually assist students to frame education in a wider school and district perspective abandoning their limited classroom teacher perspective. Betty Fry, Director of Leadership Research and Publications of SREB, conceptualizes thinking about this scaffolding progression from a teaching role to an administrative one as experiencing activities through three levels (personal communication, September 16, 2005). Students early in their leadership preparation program should be guided to *observe*. They can observe school procedures, meetings with parents, disciplinary sessions, and other events that occur where teachers are often not present. By the second level of field experiences, students *participate* in activities focused on school improvement and finally students actually *lead* events.

Just after beginning a Masters program, leadership students were sometimes thrust too quickly into too advanced administrative experiences at the school level. Without sufficient opportunity for early success, some students decided not to venture into the school leadership arena. Gradual induction might assist students in developing sufficient confidence to move forward in pursuit of administrative positions. Finally, field experiences should be extended across schools and districts. Strong alliances must be forged with districts to support true quality experiences with full time internships for students.

Extrapolating Conflicting Demands from USF to Other Educational Leadership Programs

Examination and continual improvement of our cohort delivery model has permeated our entire program. Faculty dialogue clustered around five challenges and conflicting forces that our program continues to address. These discussions prompted us to launch an exploratory online survey of randomly selected educational

leadership programs to see if they share similar perspectives. Using the 24th Edition of the Educational Administration Directory (2005-2006), published by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA), 96 institutions were randomly selected and contacted. An initial e-mail survey with one follow-up survey at the NCPEA Annual Conference 2006 gained useful information from 25 programs for a 26% response rate. Eighteen states representing large and small programs as well as private and public institutions and one historically Black program provided their insights. While the small sample size may limit generalizability of findings to all educational leadership programs, our research and experience lead us to believe that these results are representative.

The survey asked respondents to provide their perceptions about their educational leadership program, focusing on teaching tenure of candidates, distance from campus, graduates tendency to pursue administrative positions, the extent to which cohorts were being used, and whether candidates gained an administrative position within one year of graduation. Results of the national survey in Table 1 represent best estimates of department chairs and program coordinators and provide a glimpse of the national landscape. However, we are mindful of the limitations of our survey research because our methodology assumes the respondents were reasonably accurate in their estimates. Nonetheless, the reports from these programs parallel our findings about the conflicts and challenges encountered when implementing change in our own program. Our discussion focuses on five conflicts we identified from investigation of our own program and other programs.

Table 1. Estimated Percentages of Students Within Educational Leadership From Randomly Selected National Programs In 18 States (Responses n=30; programs n=25).

Item	Estimated %	Range
Students that are part time students while working as full time teachers/educators.	93.04	100 0-100
Students that have three or less years of K-12 teaching experience.	16.82	80 0-80
Students that work within 50 miles of the campus.	80.20	80 20-100
Students who are female.	65.14	27 50-77
Students that are members of an organized cohort.	52.32	100 0-100
Graduates that intend to pursue building level administrative positions.	80.94	80 20-100
Students who remain employed by the same school system after they graduate.	72.71	50 40-90
Graduates who receive administrative positions within one year of degree completion.	47.85	85 10-95
Graduates that receive administrative positions within 50 miles of our campus.	62.33	85 15-100

Our USF educational leadership program direction and progress is heavily influenced and challenged by conflict in five areas:

1. Conflict exists between knowing that our cohort model creates communities of learners with greater program satisfaction and higher completion rates versus the time and financial realities for other students forced to complete their degree over several years.

A little over 20% of USF M.Ed. students are part of a cohort while nationally our survey of 25 programs found that 52% of Masters' students were reported to be part of a cohort. Norton (1995) found that 50% of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) programs provides cohort structure at the Masters level. The 2000 study by Barnett, et al of 138 programs found that 63% of programs they surveyed were using cohort models of some type. They also found that smaller programs (less than 100 students) use cohort models less often. After

UCEA convened the Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation, Jackson and Kelley (2002) examined the most innovative programs and found that they were all cohort based. Our survey found that 76% of programs have some form of a cohort model in operation. Program disparity was significant with 6 of the 25 programs offering their Masters degree exclusively in cohorts and 6 others having no cohorts. The remaining thirteen respondents indicated that their program represented a mixture of cohort and non-cohort models.

In our DELPS M.Ed. cohort program, students complete their degree in four semesters in all day Saturday classes with online components. We have found, however, that many students cannot attend on Saturdays because of second jobs or family demands. Additionally, tuition for three courses a semester prevents many students from moving through the cohort program with ambitious course schedules. These students attend sporadically over a longer period of time often without any plan for sequencing courses.

Without the supportive nature of cohort membership, our "loners" commonly complete their courses without developing any feeling that they are in a professional learning community (Clark & Clark, 1996) and sometimes without even knowing other students in their courses. Elements supporting development of social capital (Putnam, 2000) are not woven into their program structure. They do not have the opportunity to develop a sense of commitment and belonging, which are key factors for future school principals to foster in school settings so that teachers and students experience working within a learning community.

Because the present model for non-cohort students may not be a productive environment for many students, our department developed other models that will run concomitantly. A new five semester model, distributing the courses over a longer period of time and thereby requiring less tuition each semester, is forming and includes evening course offerings. Another alternative involves cadres. We are

organizing cadres of small groups of students who work together as the larger cohort does by taking all or most courses together. The cadre becomes a learning community as the group moves through courses with various other students also enrolled each semester. A faculty member shepherds the cadre and challenges them at the doctoral level to form themes for related research applications.

2. Conflict exists between developing broader global views of pedagogy, leadership, and learning balanced with the reality that educational leadership programs primarily serve local educators who for the most part continue to serve in the same local districts upon graduation.

The school districts in University of South Florida's service region vary in size from two rural school districts each serving around 5000 students to two districts serving over 100,000 students. The nine school districts served by USF educate 21% of the state's students. Even with the multiplicity within and among school districts, 97% of our students live and work within 50 miles of our campuses. The majority (70%) intends to seek administrative assignments within that area upon graduating with occasional movement between districts. Surveyed institutions reported that 78% of their students work within 50 miles of their campus. Seventy-three percent of their graduates remain employed by the same school system with 57% of them receiving local administrative positions.

In an online survey of our Masters students, with 136 responses, 70% indicated that they intend to seek assistant principal or principal positions in the local area, which is lower than the 81% reported in our national survey. Thirty percent of our students would like to either remain in their classroom positions or seek district level assignments. When asked about future career plans, only 15% indicated any interest in becoming a superintendent.

To find common ground between our "regional reality" and national standards and perspectives, we again are cognizant of presenting a blend of theory and

practice. Our prospective school leaders have to be able to respond to accountability demands as each Florida school is labeled with annual letter grades resulting in media and realtor frenzy. Our graduates, as in other programs, most likely will stay in the region for their entire career. Yet, we want them to have a wider vision encompassing good pedagogy and best educational practices through our content based on NCATE and ELLC standards and other national benchmarks. Course content, exposure to diverse faculty, program delimitates to broaden student lenses, and curriculum rigor become more essential than ever. Conscientious effort is made to expand our students' perspective of schools through classes, seminars, special sessions held in different schools and districts present opportunities to challenge limited views of schools and schooling beyond their classrooms and schools. As an example, our students recently interacted and questioned a panel of assistant principals on a range of issues such as charter and magnet schools, grade level configurations, and alternative school configurations.

3. Conflict exists between administrative candidates' lack of experience and the challenges in Florida school districts to find increasing numbers of administrators.

Elsewhere in the country, a few highly selective leadership preparation programs are able to serve 20 students a year in intimate learning communities. These students are full time scholars with extensive internships. Florida realities of needing 10,631 teachers for the 2006-2007 school year (Critical Teacher Shortage, 2005) with the proportionate principal vacancies demand a different model to accommodate the eclectic requirements of our burgeoning, diverse student population. All but a handful of our M.Ed. program's 538 students work full time. This number closely reflects the national trend where respondents from our small study reported that 93% of their students work full time as educators.

Increasing numbers of students in our program recognize the escalation of administrative vacancies that now exist, and will exist, in the future. This has resulted in younger, less experienced graduate students. Even first year teachers are lured by higher salaries and encouraged by their principals to move toward an administrative track. We find that most of our students' teaching experience is confined to one school setting with exposure to few examples of leadership. Younger and less experienced students translate into graduates getting assistant principal positions in their mid-twenties with very few years of teaching experience.

Younger assistant principals, coupled with the need to recruit principals to replace retiring baby-boomers, result in younger school administrators. Some local districts that formerly required 5 to 7 years of experience as an assistant principal before moving someone to the principal ranks are now forced to rethink their policy. State education regulations in Florida require a minimum of 3 years experience as an assistant principal before becoming eligible for the principal's applicant pool. However, when necessary and in the best interests of the students a school board may appoint an individual who has the qualifications but not the experience.

Our national survey found that faculty members believe that 17% of their students have less than 3 years of teaching experience. National respondents also believe that slightly less than half (48%) of their students receive an administrative position within 1 year of graduating which can mean new administrators nationally are often younger with less experience. Twenty percent of the USF students are enrolled in the M.Ed. program with 3 or less years of teaching experience. These students barely meet the minimum requirement of 3 years of teaching experience for Educational Leadership certification. They seek administrative positions limited not by their potential but by their range of vision and, sometimes, maturity. Our situation as a department is that these students meet the guidelines for admission to our program thus perpetuating the reality of younger, inexperienced aspiring

administrators. This supports the need for a rigorous, rich program curriculum structured around learning communities that will continue after graduation. Learning communities support the development of each member in a safe environment fostering on-the-job growth.

4. Conflict exists between old perceptions about preparation of school leaders and the new realities of reformed and more synergistic programs.

Public Agenda conducted a survey and found that 69% of principals felt that preparation programs were disconnected from the realities of today's schools (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, & Folley, 2001). As programs struggle to redefine themselves they are continually challenged to address age-old criticisms of academia by spotlighting how to blend theory and practice. More corporate skills in marketing, sales, and considerable self-promotion are necessary to change past perceptions as many programs are making great headway blending theory and practice through course assignments, practitioner partnerships in course instruction and program development, as well as through expanded experiences and timeframes around field experiences. The criticism was valid and so it will take a concerted effort to convince students and district personnel that educational leadership programs are changing. Hopefully, Public Agenda will replicate their study with administrators who have graduated from recent programs and find a different perception. Educational leadership faculty must continue to research and exchange findings reporting the successes and 'real world' results of newly configured program designs.

Educational Leadership departments work within the larger organization of the college and the university. The commitment to change the status quo comes from the top and must be supported in resources, time, and encouragement to change. That said, as professionals we must avoid the temptation to blame the system if these things are not forthcoming, especially if it prevents us from taking responsibility for factors within our control. Each department must develop a critical

mass of the professorate willing to begin the dialogue and take the first step to change. The context and outcomes of this journey will be different for each department. Our department is fortunate to have a critical mass that began the journey in 2005 and is committed to continuous program improvement. The challenge for Educational Leadership faculty is to model the very leadership skills we teach our students to practice in the field. Bogotch (2000) reminds us, "As a continuous social construct, educational leadership cannot be one design, one program, or one mind at the exclusion of other designs, programs, and minds" (p. 10).

5. Conflict exists between fiscal support for the Department and demands for service and range of expectations.

"Do more with less" and "work smarter, not harder" have become the mantras for education at all levels. In SREB's recently released *Schools Can't Wait: Accelerating the Redesign of University Principal Preparation Programs* (2006), Fry, O'Neill, and Bottoms recognize the factors within universities that made program redesign cumbersome. Specific barriers to progress listed include "...insufficient resources; lack of administrative priority and support; departmental resistance; institutional hurdles; and state and district policies that, in effect, turn principal preparation programs into a system for raising teachers' pay" (p. 39).

This nationally recognized tension is again reflected within our program. Each part of reforming and restructuring our program has been labor intensive. For instance, expanded and meaningful field experiences demand that university supervisors provide support with site visits as well as leading individual, small group, and large group sessions. Special practitioner evening sessions, diversity activities, field trips, and other enrichment opportunities require hours of planning, communication, and coordination. As we have met with success and joined with other departments for joint sessions, the positive effects of our actions is recognized

with additional faculty and visible and verbal support from the college and university administration.

Changes in principal preparation programs require reorganization of existing educational structures as well as substantial reallocation of resources (Mullen, Gordon, Greenlee, & Anderson, 2002). Fiscal support is needed to assist in these broader definitions of the professor's role. Flexibility for differentiated staffing needs to emerge with more faculty support behind richer field experiences and school service. From a national perspective, a 2004 SREB study found that a lack of progress in redesigning educational leadership programs was most often blamed on shortages of resources (Fry, Bottoms, O'Neil, & Jacobson, 2004). To change long institutionalized faculty roles, resources for professional development and additional clinical support personnel are required.

Further, much of what is needed for true programmatic improvement is not rewarded in the tenure-earning scheme for university faculty. Revising a course or leading diversity experiences does not equate to a publication in academia. Until the university reward system is revised, meaningful programmatic change must be led by those protected by tenure and not always left to the newest professors.

Embracing the Struggle

We have found that keeping up with the rapidly changing demands on schools and the needs of our students have given us an opportunity to reflect on our leadership preparation program. Like others, we struggle to adapt our program to prepare leaders for schools that do not yet exist, that serve a more diverse constituency, and that are highly accountable for student performance. K-12 schools are loosely coupled, living systems constantly dealing with changing demands. These changing demands call for reflective, metacognitive leaders that are problem solvers with good decision making skills.

Our program has moved from a traditional one-size-fits-all model to an evolving quest to change, improve, and adjust while still maintaining rigor within the curriculum. The demand for school leaders has led to increasing growth in our program. The challenge for us is staying abreast of the changing demands while at the same time meeting and exceeding NCATE and state principal standards. We have moved to cohort models for masters and doctoral students while still offering classes for those going it alone.

Our faculty examined our course content in light of NCATE and ELLC standards incorporating critical tasks for academic rigor and field base tasks for relevance to schools. We have engaged in dialogue regarding the predominant theories that drive our program – transformational and distributed leadership - realizing the pitfalls and problems such as promoting sameness and at the same time distributing unequal power based on roles or hierarchical levels (Lumby, 2006). We realize that the next stage in our dialogue must include all theoretical views and how we can incorporate, deeply embed and embrace diversity issues within our courses. In Florida, a new licensure test based upon the state principal standards is on the horizon. As a department we will continue our plan-do-study-act dialogue about course content in relation to standards, relevant field experiences, and expectations of school administrators. It is a continuous process that comes in spurts, sometimes creating discomfort, yet it is a journey we must continually travel knowing that there will never be a point in time when we have arrived but rather times when we pause to evaluate our progress and then begin the journey again.

Preparation programs must deal with the realities of accountability placed upon schools that will be led by younger, more inexperienced teachers and provide the necessary programmatic changes to ensure that novice leaders have the skills and support system necessary to succeed. Building partnerships with school districts and programmatic changes reflecting school and student demands requires extensive

time and effort to assure meaningful dialogue among all stakeholders. As the change agents within the districts and university move to other positions, maintaining positive relationships between the institutions demands flexibility and creativity to better serve our students while addressing the needs of school systems within our service region. Positive relationships between institutions do not happen by chance and require planned, coordinated, and productive meetings much like the work required of principals in building positive community relations.

For educational leadership programs to survive, our conflicts must be recognized, embraced, and addressed. Margaret Wheatley identified the importance of conflict, disequilibrium, surprise, and loss of control when she wrote, "To stay viable, open systems maintain a state of non-equilibrium, keeping the system off balance so that it can change and grow" (Wheatley, 1992, p .78). We are off balance at a critical juncture in educational leadership today. Though the locus of control is shifting, we still have some leeway in determining how we change and grow. Our direction will be influenced by our ability to be proactive.

APPENDIX A**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA M.Ed. COHORT
PROGRAM SEMESTER THEMES**

SEMESTER	First	Second	Third	Fourth
THEMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional Leadership • Safe schools • Governance, policy context • Culture and climate • Community • Historic and philosophic development • Curriculum • Organizational theory • Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate methods of inquiry • Program evaluation • Analysis • Interpreting data • Monitoring • Learning • Instruction • Social capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codes, rights, courts • School reform • Prioritizing • Change • Policy • Ethics • Equity • Social justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel evaluation • Teacher evaluation • Decision making • Professional development • Managing • HR • Visioning
TECHNOLOGY STRAND	Journaling, portfolio formation, Internet, electronic mail, distance learning	Create a data base, statistical software, curriculum design with technology,	Excel for budgets, research, case law sources; electronic spreadsheets, administrative software	Teacher evaluation instruments and other HR examples
DIVERSITY STRAND	Analysis of community problems; diversity menu, reflective practice	Analysis of community diversity and disability challenges	Equity study of some facet or change process	Case analysis
FIELD EXPERIENCE STRAND	Shadowing, safe school survey, interview to determine instructional leader, assess climate, school board meeting	Action research, review test data, school improvement plan	Local accounting systems, local policy review, apply law to school practices	Align professional development, curriculum mapping, time studies, HR placement

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